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Nonhuman Primate Models for AIDS

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Historically, animal model systems have been important components of biomedical research, and the same is proving true for research directed at the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) pandemic. The most relevant and valuable models for studying infection by HIV-1 and HIV-2 and progression to AIDS involve infection of nonhuman primates with HIV-1, HIV-2, or some of the closely related simian immunodeficiency viruses (SIVs). The SIV macaque model has proven valuable in all aspects of AIDS-related research, with primary emphasis on defining pathogenic properties of lentiviruses and on testing novel approaches for prophylactic and therapeutic intervention. Because of certain limitations with the HIV-1 chimpanzee model, not the least of which is the expense involved, the use of HIV-naïve chimpanzees should be limited to experiments related to vaccine development, an area for which their value has been demonstrated. Continued efforts to halt the spread of HIV infection and progression of HIV-related diseases will require further use of these animal models.

Animal models have played an important role in biomedical research and in the advancement of scientific knowledge in general. Of 82 Nobel Prizes for Physiology and Medicine awarded between 1901 and 1982, 71% were for research that involved the use of animals [1]. In the current war against AIDS, the use of animal models has contributed significantly to understanding the pathogenesis of and to developing vaccines against the causative agent, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Although several potential animal models exist, the most relevant for HIV are nonhuman primates infected with HIV-1, HIV-2, or various strains of the closely related simian immunodeficiency viruses (SIVs). To date, the models that have proven most valuable include chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*, HIV-1); cynomolgus monkeys (*Macaca fascicularis*, HIV-2); and rhesus (*Macaca mulatta*), pig-tailed (*Macaca nemestrina*), and cynomolgus macaque monkeys (SIV). This presentation is not meant to be a comprehensive review of all the various SIVs and animal models for HIV infection. Instead, the salient features of some specific systems used in my research program will be discussed to illustrate the primary value of each model.

HIV-1 Infection of Chimpanzees

The basic characteristics of HIV-1 infection of chimpanzees are similar to those of HIV-1 infection of humans, especially with respect to routes of transmission, development of humoral and cell-mediated immunity, and the fact that long-

term persistent infections are established. Although no HIV-1-infected chimpanzee has developed symptoms of AIDS or AIDS-related conditions, hematologic abnormalities have been described. It is possible, therefore, that some of these animals eventually will develop overt disease.

Transmission of HIV-1 to chimpanzees. HIV-1 infections in chimpanzees can be established easily by intravenous inoculation of either cell-free or cell-associated HIV-1 and by transfusion of infected blood or blood products [2, 3]. Although data are more limited, perinatal infection can occur [4] and application of cell-free HIV-1 to the vaginal mucosa [5] or deposition of peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) from an unrelated HIV-infected chimpanzee to the cervical or vaginal mucosa in the absence of trauma can result in infection (unpublished data). Furthermore, HIV-1 does not appear to be easily transmitted between juvenile cagemates when only one animal of a pair is infected [6]; this situation simulates the lack of transmission by casual contact among humans.

Natural history of HIV-1 infection of chimpanzees. After exposure to an infectious inoculum, the natural history of HIV-1 infection in chimpanzees mimics that in humans. High levels of viral replication occur initially, as detected by quantification of infectious PBMC and isolation of cell-free virus from plasma. As HIV-1-specific serum antibodies are produced and antibody titers increase, viremia and numbers of infectious PBMC decrease [3, 5]. After ~6 weeks, cell-free virus is rarely isolated from plasma of infected animals, but virus can be isolated repeatedly from their PBMC (in >95% of attempts) throughout the resulting long-term infection [7]. This scenario is generally observed after inoculation of the two HIV-1 isolates most frequently used in chimpanzee studies: lymphadenopathy-associated virus type 1 (LAV-1 [LAI]) and human T-cell leukemia virus IIIB (LAI). However, the ease with which HIV-1 can be recovered from PBMC of infected chimpanzees is specific for a particular

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virus isolate. For example, the SF2 (ARV-2) strain appears less infectious for chimpanzees: There are longer intervals between inoculation and initial time of virus recovery and sporadic, less frequent success in isolating virus from the infected animal's PBMC [8, 9].

At ~6 months after infection, overall serum antibody titers plateau and then remain relatively stable. However, loss of antibodies to *gag*-encoded proteins has been observed in some chimpanzees after extended periods of infection [7], just as occurs in HIV-infected persons. Neutralizing antibodies that are initially type specific but that broaden with time of infection to neutralize more diverse isolates can be detected [10, 11]. Other HIV-1-specific immune responses that have been described in infected chimpanzees include antibody-dependent cell-mediated cytotoxic activity, T cell proliferative responses to HIV-1 and recombinant HIV antigens, and major histocompatibility complex-restricted cytotoxic T cell activity [9, 10, 12-14]. The ability of chimpanzee CD8⁺ lymphocytes to suppress HIV-1 replication in CD4⁺ cells has been described [15]. Furthermore, since chimpanzees normally have more CD8⁺ than CD4⁺ cells, it is possible that CD8⁺ lymphocytes may contribute to the failure of HIV-infected chimpanzees to develop AIDS-defining conditions.

Indications of disease in HIV-1-infected chimpanzees. While most of the >100 HIV-1-infected chimpanzees in the United States were exposed to the virus <4 years ago, some animals have now been infected for as long as 9 years. Although none has developed symptoms consistent with AIDS, there have been reports of persistent abnormalities in some animals. Two chimpanzees had generalized lymphadenopathy that persisted for ~7 months before spontaneously regressing [2, 16]. In addition, decreased numbers and percentages of CD4⁺ lymphocytes, thrombocytopenia, hypergammaglobulinemia, and neutropenia have been described [3, 14]. In one animal with decreased numbers of peripheral blood CD4⁺ cells (as low as 134/ μ L) and thrombocytopenia that persisted >18 months, plasma viremia and antigenemia were detected transiently, concomitant with onset of thrombocytopenia [14]. These results suggest a relationship between increased virus expression and disease symptoms; this correlation has been demonstrated for HIV-1 infection of humans and SIV infection of macaques (see below). Furthermore, analysis of the SIV model system also suggests a direct correlation between disease induction in a certain species and the cytopathicity of a virus isolate for CD4⁺ lymphocytes of that species (see below). Several chimpanzees, including most of those with hematologic abnormalities mentioned above, are infected with an HIV-1 isolate that has been shown to be cytopathic for chimpanzee CD4⁺ cells and to replicate efficiently in chimpanzee macrophages in vitro [17, 18].

Because of the close evolutionary relationship between chimpanzees and humans and the fact that there is a 10-year

Table 1. Chimpanzee human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1) model in vaccine efficacy testing.

Advantages

- Infection established with low doses of virus
- Infection established with cell-free or cell-associated virus
- Infection established by intravenous or mucosal routes
- Humoral responses mimic those of humans
- Virus easily recovered from peripheral blood mononuclear cells

Disadvantages

- Cannot assess prevention of disease
- Chimpanzees not equally susceptible to all strains of HIV-1

latent period between infection and diagnosis of AIDS for infected persons, it is probable that, if some chimpanzees eventually develop severe disease, the latent period will also be long. Furthermore, it is possible that the latent period for HIV-infected chimpanzees might be artificially extended because these animals are housed in isolation and are not routinely exposed to infectious agents as are humans. Because HIV-1 expression can be potentiated by cytokines and other microbial agents [19, 20], it is reasonable to assume that any infectious agent or injury that induces cytokines or inflammatory responses will also result in increased HIV replication, a factor known to correlate directly with disease progression [21-23].

In fact, evidence to support this assumption exists. After immune stimulation of HIV-1-infected chimpanzees by administration of either recall or irrelevant antigens, rapid but transient increases in virus expression were detected by monitoring HIV-1-specific cellular and humoral immunity and by quantifying numbers of infectious PBMC [13, 24]. These studies suggest that prophylactic immunization against other pathogens or immunotherapeutic treatment of HIV-1-infected persons should be combined with antiretroviral therapy and that these persons should be monitored closely for changes in virus burden.

Value of the chimpanzee HIV-1 model. Even if chimpanzees eventually do develop AIDS, it would be unrealistic to use this species in pathogenicity studies because there are limited numbers of chimpanzees available; the expense involved in using sufficient numbers to generate statistically significant data is too great; and more importantly, the long latent period for disease development would require inordinately long follow-up times before useful conclusions could be made. Animals already infected with HIV-1, however, could be used to identify cofactors that facilitate manifestations of disease or to determine the effects of novel therapeutics on virus load [7].

The real value of chimpanzees is in the development of HIV-1 vaccines; these animals have played and will continue to play an important role in vaccine safety and efficacy trials. Although HIV-1 infection of chimpanzees is not an ideal model, it is the most suitable (table 1). Immunization of

Table 2. Nonhuman primate species from which simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) has been isolated.

Species	Common name	Natural host	Disease*
Asian			
<i>Macaca mulatta</i>	Rhesus macaque	No	Yes
<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>	Pig-tailed macaque	No	Yes
<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>	Cynomolgus monkey	No	Yes
<i>Macaca arctoides</i>	Stump-tailed macaque	No	Yes
African			
<i>Cercocebus atys</i>	Sooty mangabey monkey	Yes	No
<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>	African green monkey	Yes	No
<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	Sykes' monkey	Yes	No
<i>Papio sphinx</i>	Mandrill (baboon)	Yes	U
<i>Pan troglodytes</i> †	Chimpanzee	U	U

NOTE. U, unknown.

* Experimental infection results in AIDS-like disease in species from which isolated.

† Chimpanzees are not simians and, therefore, isolates from this species should be designated CIV instead of SIV.

chimpanzees with various HIV-1 antigens, followed by challenge with cell-free or cell-associated virus, has demonstrated induction of protective immune responses [25–27]. Future studies will be required, however, to develop vaccines that elicit broadly reactive, group-specific immunity against the genetically diverse strains found worldwide; to determine whether mucosal immunity can be induced and protection against mucosal challenge can be achieved; and to optimize antigen presentation and immunization regimens to induce long-lasting protective immunity with a minimal number of vaccinations.

SIV Infection of Macaques

Diversity of SIV isolates. Lentiviruses closely related to, but distinct from, HIV-1 have been isolated from nine different nonhuman primate species, not all of which appear to be natural hosts (table 2). On the basis of comparisons of nucleotide sequences, HIVs and SIVs have been placed in five distinct subgroups, all of which are approximately equidistant from one another, with 40%–50% sequence homology. These subgroups include all of the SIV isolates from macaques and sooty mangabey monkeys together with HIV-2 isolates (SIV_{smm}, SIV_{mac}, and HIV-2); a more diverse group of isolates from African green monkeys (SIV_{agm}); isolates from mandrills (SIV_{md}); isolates from Sykes' monkeys (SIV_{syk}); and the HIV-1 and SIV_{cpz} isolates [28, 29]. It is highly likely that the number of distinct primate lentivirus subgroups will increase as more nucleotide sequence data are obtained from viruses isolated from other species.

Variation in pathogenesis of SIV infections. Because many SIV strains do not cause disease in their natural hosts (e.g., SIV_{smm}) but do elicit disease similar to human AIDS

when inoculated into various macaque species, the opportunity exists to compare the natural history of infection in hosts for which the viruses are differentially pathogenic. In this way it may be possible to identify factors of the host or the virus that determine disease outcome. Additionally, infection of one Asian macaque species with different SIV isolates or of different macaque species with one SIV isolate can result in diverse pathogenicities with varying intervals of time from inoculation of virus to death due to AIDS-like disease. Thus, depending on the experimental question to be asked, one can optimize the information to be gained by selecting both the most appropriate macaque species and SIV isolate.

Two closely related SIV_{smm} isolates, SIV_{smm9} and SIV_{smmPBj14}, illustrate these points (table 3). Isolate smm9 was originally obtained from a naturally infected sooty mangabey monkey [30], whereas smmPBj14 was isolated from a pig-tailed macaque at the time it died of AIDS, 14 months after experimental inoculation of smm9 [31]. Although smm9 is the parental strain of smmPBj14, these two viruses exhibit very different pathogenicities. While smm9 elicits disease characteristic of lentiviruses, that is, a slowly progressive form [32], smmPBj14 induces a rapidly fatal disease. The acute disease caused by smmPBj14 is characterized, in general, by onset of bloody, mucoid diarrhea 4–8 days after inoculation, followed by death 2–4 days later. While the probable cause of death was originally thought to be due to metabolic acidosis and electrolyte imbalance resulting from dehydration, death frequently occurred despite fluid replacement therapy. More recent studies in which animals did not have diarrhea but still died 7–8 days after infection suggest that the acute disease may be similar to toxic shock syndrome and may result from inflammatory acute-phase reactant products induced by production of large amounts of virus and large numbers of proliferating lymphocytes (unpublished data). Gross pathology is characterized by severe gastroenterocolitis and generalized lymphadenopathy with

Table 3. Differential outcomes of persistent infections with two simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) isolates.

Isolate/ species	Outcome	Time to death
SIV smm9		
<i>Cercocebus atys</i>	Asymptomatic infection	Natural
<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>	Chronic AIDS-like disease	7–14 months
<i>Macaca mulatta</i>	Chronic AIDS-like disease	14–>48 months
SIV smmPBj14		
<i>C. atys</i>	Acute fatal disease	10–13 days
<i>M. nemestrina</i>	Acute fatal disease	6–14 days
<i>M. mulatta</i> *	Chronic AIDS-like disease	14–>40 months
	Acute fatal disease	7–14 days

* Rhesus macaques show extreme variation in susceptibility to smmPBj14, with only 30%–50% of infected animals developing the acute disease syndrome and dying.

diffuse lymphoid hyperplasia, which is most prominent in the Peyer's patches and other gut-associated lymphoid tissues [31]. Despite extreme differences in pathogenicities, the overall divergence of the smm9 and smmPBj14 nucleotide sequences is only 1.6% [33], indicating that minor mutations in lentivirus genomes can result in significantly increased virulence.

Because two closely related viruses (smm9 and smmPBj14) exhibit pathogenic extremes for mangabey monkeys and pig-tailed macaques, these two models provide a valuable system by which to identify correlates of disease. Comparison of the natural histories of smm9 infection in mangabeys and macaques revealed no major differences in the initial immune responses to the virus; however, macaques eventually progress to disease while mangabeys do not. The most striking differences were detected when virus burdens, that is, viremia and frequency of virus isolation from PBMC, were compared. Experimental infection of macaques elicited virus-specific immunity that, in some animals, can minimize virus burden for extended periods. In addition, in infected macaques progression to more severe disease correlated directly with increased levels of viremia. Surprisingly, asymptomatic infections in mangabeys were accompanied by very high virus loads, comparable to that seen in SIV-infected macaques with disease symptoms. Thus, the immune response of mangabeys appears unable to control SIV replication and dissemination but the animals do not develop disease [34].

The development of AIDS in both humans and monkeys is accompanied by loss of CD4⁺ lymphocytes. Using in vitro assays, we determined whether SIV_{smm} was cytopathic for mangabey and macaque CD4⁺ cells obtained from PBMC of normal animals. After infection of whole PBMC or CD4⁺-enriched lymphocytes with smm9, preferential loss of macaque, but not mangabey, CD4⁺ lymphocytes was observed during viral replication [34]. These results suggested that cytopathicity for CD4⁺ lymphocytes, and not virus burden per se, may be important in eventual development of disease.

This hypothesis was tested further in similar experiments with the acutely lethal variant smmPBj14, which causes an identical disease syndrome in both mangabeys and macaques. Infection with this virus or its biologically and molecularly cloned derivatives (which also induce the acute disease) resulted in preferential loss of CD4⁺ cells in PBMC from both species [35]. These results suggest that the degree of cytopathicity for CD4⁺ lymphocytes may be an important determinant of disease. This concept is supported by the fact that SIV_{agm} does not appear to cause disease in its natural host and in vitro is not cytopathic for African green monkey CD4⁺ cells [36]. If this apparent correlation is true, it would strengthen the idea that HIV-1-infected chimpanzees have the potential to develop disease.

Value of the macaque SIV model systems. Many facets of SIV infection of macaques are highly analogous to those of

HIV-1 infection of humans. This is true for the natural history of infection and for specific manifestations of disease, including loss of CD4⁺ cells, development of lymphomas [37], central nervous system involvement [38, 39], and types of opportunistic infections that occur [40–42]. Thus, the real value of this simian model is in defining viral and host factors that influence disease development, especially early after infection. An example of how the system can be manipulated was reported by Kestler et al. [43]. Using molecularly cloned viruses derived from an SIV_{mac} isolate, these investigators demonstrated a requirement for a functional *nef* gene for efficient replication and disease induction in macaques. Studies such as this may enable researchers to target specific HIV genetic regions or functions for intervention.

The macaque SIV model is also valuable for testing novel approaches and drugs for prophylactic and therapeutic efficacy [44, 45], including protection of fetuses [46], and for establishing important requirements for lentivirus vaccines [47, 48]. However, because potentially important differences may exist between immunologically relevant epitopes of SIV and HIV-1 [49], chimpanzees will continue to be used for definitive testing of HIV-1 vaccine candidates. The constraints associated with the use of chimpanzees may be alleviated by the recent construction of HIV-SIV chimeric viruses that express the HIV-1 envelope glycoprotein and infect macaques [50, 51].

Conclusions

Infection of chimpanzees with HIV-1 and macaques with SIV provide excellent animal models for studying all aspects of pathogenesis and prevention of HIV infection. Use of these models has resulted in substantial progress in understanding the interactions between lentiviruses and host cells that result in disease. Because no tissue culture system can adequately simulate the complexities of the body, these valuable animal resources will continue to be important in attempts to stop the spread of HIV infection and to prevent progression to AIDS.

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